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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES.

I.

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

PERHAPS it is expecting too much to look for a thorough and exhaustive biography of Mr. Beecher within little more than a year after his death. He was so remarkable a man from almost every point of view, that twelve months of continuous work even by an experienced literary toiler, with the materials mostly ready to his hand, would scarce suffice to do full justice to the subject. The volume recently issued by Websters,* though of respectable dimensions and filled with interesting details, yet bears marks of condensation as to matter and haste in composition which will disappoint many, but which nevertheless could hardly have been avoided under the circumstances. Still another criticism *in limine* is that such a biography as the public have a right to expect could not in the nature of the case be written by members of Mr. Beecher's family. Doubtless his wife, his son, and his son-in-law had such exceptional opportunities of observing the father and the husband as would make their contributions to a standard work most acceptable, but their estimate and verdict in many points must necessarily be partial, their ideas of what should and should not be published, their judgments as to Mr. Beecher's public and private actions and contact with men and affairs, can scarcely be regarded as judicial. A study of Mr. Beecher's life, character, and works is a task worthy of the most thorough treatment by minds not only capable of understanding the man but also absolutely unbiased by personal and family feelings. Perhaps it will be difficult, perhaps impossible, to find a biographer of Mr. Beecher. If he had died soon after the termination of the great war, or immediately after the celebration of the Plymouth "silver wedding," the selection would have been comparatively easy.

The above remarks seem called for in explanation of several features about this book, which have subjected it to a great deal of adverse criticism in certain quarters. It must be remembered that this is avowedly a "family history" of Beecher. It is a tribute of reverence and affection by his own kith and kin, and in part, a continuation of an autobiography which he had begun to write, and on which a contract had been made with the publishers a short time before his death. For reasons which seem to us perfectly rational the family of Mr. Beecher wished the public to know the story of his life as he and they might tell it. Such a book on such a man could not be otherwise than partial, but might not be less interesting and even valuable, from this standpoint. Taking up the volume with this understanding of its purport, it is only just to state that it is rich in its collection of facts, and bears evidence of singular industry and devotion on the part of its compilers. Should the real "Life and Works of Beecher" ever be written, a large

* "Biography of Rev. Henry Ward Beecher." By Wm. C. Beecher and Rev. Samuel Scoville, assisted by Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher. New York: Charles L. Webster & Co.

part of this book might be quoted verbatim, and the remainder would deserve careful perusal by the writer of a more pretentious biography.

The first six chapters deal with Mr. Beecher's ancestry and early life and surroundings, and a great deal is told in his own words. Much is not new, but it is very charming reading and very naturally told. We can well picture young Henry at school learning grammar. "Now, Henry, *a* is the definite article, and must be used with a singular noun. You can say *a man* but you can't say *a men*, can you?" "Yes, I can; father always says '*amen*' at the end of his prayers." The Calvinistic training to which he was subjected in early life and its influence upon him are depicted with candor. He says: "I never had the remotest idea of God except that he was a sovereign who sat with a sceptre in his hand, and had his eye on me, and said, 'I see you and I am after you!'" But the home influences of his youth were far from gloomy, notwithstanding their strong Puritanism.

The period from his entrance to college life until his call to Brooklyn is disposed of in four chapters. Two chapters are given to his early experiences in his new pastoral field, and then follow ten chapters concerning his more distinctively public career as the champion of the slave, supplemented by a chapter on the "silver wedding." Three chapters are devoted to the great scandal, and whatever may be said about the policy of introducing so unsavory a topic into these family memoirs, it seems to us that the compilers of this history had no choice. In their view it was from first to last a great conspiracy, in which truth came out victorious, though at terrible cost. To blot out events of such momentous interest in Mr. Beecher's life is impossible, and to attempt to ignore them would therefore be foolish. Perhaps less might have been written without detriment to the history, but some allowance must surely be made for the warmth and zeal of an advocacy sustained by such tender, and powerful sentiments and convictions.

The rest of the book—chapters 27 to 32—concerns itself with the later personal history of Mr. Beecher, with sketches and estimates of the man from various point of view. His home life in the city and country are well described, and the closing chapter gives an account of his last journey to England, and of his sickness and death.

We wish that greater care had been taken in the matter of the illustrations. The portrait in the frontispiece is very fine, but many of the other pictures are rather mean affairs. On the whole, the book is one of singular interest, and will, we think, grow in public favor.

II.

BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE PERKINS MARSH.

THE first volume of the life and letters of George Perkins Marsh,* edited by his wife, appears in a handsome and substantial dress. The contents are slightly disappointing, partly because the most important period in the life of this distinguished scholar and diplomat, namely, his residence as United States Minister in Italy, is barely mentioned in the close of the volume, and its consideration reserved for the second volume. The record of the life of a literary man, unless closely connected with leading historical events or brilliantly irradiated by the light of genius, is unfrequently of sufficient interest to warrant extension beyond a single volume. And, although Mr. Marsh holds a high and worthy position among the men of his time, and has made valuable contributions to the etymology and history of our language, it may be questioned whether this work of nearly five

*"Life and Letters of George Perkins Marsh." Compiled by Caroline Crane Marsh. In two volumes. Vol. I. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.